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ABSTRACT

This digest consolidates recent, key information on minority representation in the teaching profession. Despite widespread efforts to recruit minority teachers, by 1983 the total had decreased 1.5% (down to 11% since 1973). Therefore, many students will go through their entire school career with no minority teachers, no role models, and no sense that teaching is a profession for minorities. Some reasons for this decrease are: (1) increased possibilities for minorities to make more money and win greater prestige in other professions; (2) decrease in minority recruitment and enrollment in colleges; (3) dissatisfaction with the teaching profession; (4) a popular misconception that there is a teacher surplus; and (5) state testing in which minority teachers have low passing rates. Other problems with minority teacher employment include the desegregation efforts which have given many more white teachers jobs which black teachers would otherwise have held; seniority and tenure provisions that have kept white teachers in jobs; and government moves toward incentive grants and tax incentives that diminish programs traditionally employing minority teachers. Some suggestions on how to increase minority participation in the teaching profession are included. (CG)

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Until teaching becomes a more attractive career, the problems of recruiting and retaining talented teachers, including minorities, will undermine the success of other reform intended to upgrade educational programs and curricula.

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Increasing Minority Participation in the Teaching Profession

A variety of factors appear to have contributed to the current decline in the number of minorities who select and then actually enter careers in teaching. This decline is occurring at a time when the number of new recruits to teaching is insufficient to meet present and projected needs. Although teacher shortages have occurred before, most recently in the 1960s (Darling-Hammond, 1984), there are new reasons, as well as equity implications, for the current shortages of minority teachers.

Evidence of the Decline

Data derived from reports issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Froning, 1976) and the National Center for Educational Statistics (1984) are revealing. In 1974, 12.5 percent of full-time teachers in public schools were black. By 1983, the total for *all* minorities had decreased to 11 percent, despite widespread efforts during the period to promote affirmative action and equal employment opportunity.

This trend has increased the possibility that a student might be able to complete twelve years of public education without coming into contact with a single minority teacher. The absence of a representative number of minority teachers and administrators in a pluralistic society is damaging because it distorts social reality for children (Witty, 1982). Besides sending a message to all students that teaching is off limits to minorities, the absence of minority teachers deprives students of access to successful minority role models, an important consideration in light of the growing proportion of minority students enrolled in the nation's public schools.

Increased Career Opportunities for Minorities

Among the interrelated factors accounting for declining minority participation in the teaching force is the issue of career choice. Employment opportunities for minorities have traditionally been limited to only a few options, including teaching, government service, and social work. However, academically talented minorities are now pursuing other occupations that promise greater financial rewards and career opportunities and better working conditions (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Many talented minority youths are also entering military service, perhaps to obtain educational and training benefits (Hodgkinson, 1985).

Access to Higher Education

Minorities cannot become teachers unless they graduate from college. However, higher education enrollment rates of blacks and Hispanics appear to be in decline. Despite the high rate of early school leaving among black and Hispanic students, the secondary school graduation rates of minority students increased between 1975 and 1983, but they have not been matched by an increase in college attendance (Astin, 1982; Marks, 1984).

According to a report from the American Council on Education (Lee, 1985), the decision to attend college continues to be influenced by a student's socioeconomic circumstances, a factor that often discourages minorities from enrolling. Minority access to higher education has been affected by declines in financial aid, as well as the lack of a perceived relationship between a college degree and a good job, and inadequate high school counseling which leaves students ill-prepared for entering and succeeding in college (Hodgkinson, 1985; Ramon, 1986).

Access to higher education is also influenced by recruitment efforts. In a study of student recruitment efforts undertaken by 245 postsecondary institutions,

the majority reported both an underrepresentation of minority students and an absence of systematic student recruitment programs to attract minorities (Crabtree, 1983).

Students may be able to complete twelve years of public education without coming into contact with a single minority teacher.

Black colleges and universities historically have produced more than fifty percent of the nation's black teachers (Wright, 1980). Unfortunately, access to teacher training in these schools is being threatened. Many black schools and their departments of education may lose their accreditation because of a failure to meet recent state mandates requiring a prescribed percentage of graduates to pass various competency tests. Since 1978, the number of new teachers produced by 45 predominantly black colleges has declined 47 percent (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1983).

Dissatisfaction with the Teaching Profession

Low salaries and low occupational prestige are major reasons for difficulties in recruiting new entrants into the teaching profession (College Board, 1985). Teachers' salaries often fall well below those of most other occupations that require a college degree. In addition, teachers lack input into professional decisionmaking, experience restrictive bureaucratic controls and inadequate administrative support, and lack opportunities for advancement (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Salaries and working conditions for teachers are often least attractive in schools with predominant minority enrollments, where minority teachers might be interested in working. Until teaching becomes a more attractive career alternative, the problems of attracting and retaining talented teachers, including minorities, will undermine the success of other reforms intended to upgrade educational programs and curricula.

Popular Conceptions of a Teacher Surplus

The collapse of the teacher job market in the 1970s has played an important part in shrinking the talent pool that is now available. The previous lack of good job prospects for teachers may be continuing to lead potential recruits away from the profession because they believe that there is still a surplus of teachers (Witty, 1980). A further result of the former contracting market demand for new teachers has been a decline not only in the quantity of potential education students but also in the quality of the applicant pool prepared to enter education as a career (Weaver, 1979).

Teacher Competency Testing

Public concern over the quality of education in American schools has led to an increased emphasis on teacher competency testing. Currently, more than half the states require aspiring teachers to pass a state-prescribed test, either before entering a teacher education program or before being certified to teach. Although competency tests have not been shown to predict effective teaching (Pugach & Raths, 1983), they do represent a step in the direction of requiring greater teacher accountability. Unfortunately, in states with competency testing, a disproportionate number of minority candidates perform below the passing rate; failure rates for blacks and other minorities are two to ten times higher than those of whites (College Board, 1985; Gifford, 1985; Goodison, 1985). The net effect of using competency tests to improve teacher quality is thus to reduce minority representation in the profession. Testing teachers may decrease the number of minority teaching candidates in other ways, as widespread announcement of the poor performance of minorities on competency tests discourages blacks from choosing teaching as a career (Hackley, 1985) or from teaching in states that mandate competency testing.

The high rates of test failure for minorities appear to reflect two critical conditions: a lack of interest in teaching on the part of many well-qualified minority students who could easily pass the tests, and the general failure of education to teach students to read with comprehension, write clearly, and perform routine mathematical computations (Gifford, 1985; Witty, 1982). Additionally, concerns are raised that standardized tests are biased against minorities and low-income students (Mercer, 1983).

Failure rates on teacher competency tests are two to ten times higher for blacks and other minorities than for whites.

Trends in the Employment of Teachers

Some evidence exists that the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954 had the unforeseen consequence of contributing to the declining participation of minorities in teaching. Ethridge (1979) and Smith (1984a) note that the Brown decision was followed by the loss of thousands of teaching jobs that would have gone to minorities under a segregated system, which instead went to white teachers. Many blacks with teaching certificates may have settled into positions outside teaching because potential teaching positions were placed out of their reach by the disproportionate hiring of new white teachers (Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, 1984).

Seniority and tenure provisions won by teacher unions have also contributed to the loss of teaching positions held by minorities. During periods of enrollment decline and fiscal restraint, the first teachers dismissed are usually those with the least seniority. Minorities, often the last hired, are usually among the first fired (Encarnation & Richards, 1984; Trammer, 1980). In addition, Gehrke and Sheffield (1985) show how, in an urban school district, the decision about whether to lay teachers off or to reassign or recertify them in another content area was resolved more frequently in favor of white males than women and minorities. Evidence of limited career mobility is a signal to potential teachers that schools are not places where they will have the opportunity to experience professional growth, either in the classroom or on the educational administration career ladder

(Gehrke and Sheffield, 1985). One approach, used in Baltimore, Maryland, that has overcome the built-in susceptibility of minority teachers to layoffs based on seniority exempts less senior teachers who received "outstanding" on two of their last three evaluations (Trammer, 1980).

In the past, major government-supported programs such as compensatory education and bilingual education have increased minority teacher employment. There is evidence that the recent federal and state movement toward incentive grants and tax incentives may serve to diminish the direct and positive effects of government aid on minority employment by limiting or eliminating programs in which there is a high concentration of minority teacher employment (Encarnation & Richards, 1984).

Increasing Minority Access to the Profession

Efforts to increase the number of minority recruits to the teaching profession should be part of state reform initiatives. They should address the effects of educational deprivation resulting from weak programs in elementary and secondary education which leave many minorities unprepared for a teaching career (Hackley, 1985; Hoover, 1984; Witty, 1982). Limiting admission to the profession to those who are already well educated will not redress the problem of teacher shortages. Efforts should be made to enhance the academic abilities of a larger number of students (Hackley, 1985).

The Brown v. Board of Education decision had the unforeseen consequence of contributing to declining numbers of minority teachers.

The pool of potential minority recruits to teaching can be expanded through a decrease in the number of minority students who are early school leavers (Witty, 1982). Gifford (1985) proposes the early identification and recruitment of minority high school students who are interested in a teaching career as part of a special university based, pre-professional teacher preparation program. In addition to the traditional criteria of grades and past achievement, admission to the program would be based on potential for growth and willingness to learn. Particular emphasis would be placed on the recruitment of minority students with an interest in math, science, language, and other areas of special need. The program would require a five year university course leading to a B.A. degree and would provide a series of paid school year and summer internships.

Smith (1984a) and Darling-Hammond (1984) recommend the use of financial incentives — scholarships, forgiveable loans — to attract talented students to teaching. More effective counseling at stages when career decisions are made, concerted recruitment programs aimed at minority students, and flexible admissions procedures in teacher preparation programs have also been proposed as methods to increase the pool of potential teachers (Hackley, 1985; Mercer, 1984; Smith, 1984b).

Schools of education and teacher training institutions can play an important role in efforts to train minority teachers from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Several historically black colleges, notably Coppin State College and the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, have been successful in developing teacher education programs that emphasize early assessment to diagnose skills deficiencies brought from elementary and secondary education and provide appropriate tutorials, remediation, and workshops in test-taking techniques (Cooper, 1986; Hackley, 1985).

— **Michael B. Webb, Ed.D.**

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